

## Unit 7 Possibility and probability

*Oxford Living Grammar* explains how grammar works and when to use it. The exercises use real-life situations to practise grammar in context. This lesson consolidates your students' knowledge of expressing possibility and probability with the modal verbs *may*, *might*, *could*, *must* and *can't* with the opportunity to practise in the context of future plans.

**Lesson length:** 45 mins

- Aim:**
1. to review the use of *may*, *might*, *could*, *must* and *can't* to express possibility and probability
  2. to review the use of *may*, *might* and *could* when talking about possibility and probability in the future
  3. to extend vocabulary for expressing probability

**Preparation:** You will need a copy of the following for each student/pair of students:

Activity worksheet: Possibility and probability

Activity worksheet: *Oxford Word Skills* Unit 59 - I can express probability

### Grammar Review:

- Write the following phrases on the board:  
wears a wedding ring / be married      don't know where Dad is / be in the garden  
sky looks cloudy / rain                      Anna's too far behind / win the race  
bought a lottery ticket / be a millionaire
- Say aloud:  
*She wears a wedding ring. ~ She must be married.*  
*I don't know where Dad is. ~ He may be in the garden.*  
*The sky looks cloudy. ~ It might rain.*  
*Anna's too far behind. ~ She can't win the race.*  
*I've bought a lottery ticket. ~ You could be a millionaire!*
- Ask students to repeat the phrases after you. Then say aloud the first part only and ask students to complete the phrases aloud as a class in response. Write the complete phrase with the modal verbs in place on the board.
- Tell the class that these phrases are all about possibility and probability. For each phrase, ask whether the speaker feels sure about what they are saying, or whether they think what they are saying is possible, but they aren't sure.
- Draw this diagram on the board underneath the example sentences, but don't include the modal verbs. Tell students that the line represents how sure we are about something. Ask students to put *may*, *might*, *could*, *must* and *can't* in the correct place.

- isn't      *can't* be      *could* be      *may/might* be      *must* be      is +

---

- Looking again at the example sentences, ask: "Are these sentences about now or the future?" [She must be married. - now He may/might be in the garden. - now It may/might rain. - future She can't win the race. - now You could become a millionaire. - future.]

- Highlight the form **modal + verb** and clarify that *may, might* and *could* can be used to talk about possibility now or in the future. Highlight the negative forms of *may* and *might* = *may not* and *might not / mightn't* (to say that is it possible that something won't happen e.g. **I forgot to check. Ed might not know how to get here.**).

### 1. Review Activity

- Tell students that you are going to think about Holly and Adam's plans for the future. They have just got married. Ask students to suggest some things they might do in the future.
- Use these prompt sentences from the exercise 'What to do, where to go' as a transformation drill to give controlled practice of *may, might, could, must* and *can't*. The first two can be given as examples.  
T: I'm sure they're very happy. ▶SS: They must be ...  
T: Perhaps they'll stay with their parents. ▶SS: They may/might stay ...  
T: Maybe they'll go abroad. ▶SS: They may/might go ...  
T: I assume that Holly's not interested in her job. ▶SS: Holly can't be ...  
T: Perhaps the company won't renew their contracts. ▶SS: The company may not/might not ...  
T: Maybe they'll take a postgraduate course. ▶SS: They may/might take ...  
T: I'm sure they have some savings. ▶SS: They must have ...  
T: Maybe Adam's father will find work for them. ▶Adam's father may/might find ...  
T: Perhaps Holly won't want to work with Adam's father. ▶SS: Holly may not / might not want ...  
T: I'm sure it isn't easy to work for your in-laws. ▶SS: It can't be easy to work ...

### 2. Review Activity

- Give out Activity Worksheets. Give students two minutes to complete activity 1 'What to do, where to go' as consolidation. Make sure you set a time limit and tell students when they have one minute or thirty seconds left, for example, to keep the lesson moving.
- Direct students to activity 2 'Guess who it is!' Ask the students to read the sentences and check that there is no unfamiliar vocabulary. Ask students to make sentences with *may, might, could, can't* and *must*. Look at the first sentence together as an example:  
*He studied journalism and advertising at college.*  
e.g. He may be a journalist. He might work for an advertising company.
- Ask the students to work in pairs to write more sentences with a range of modals for each item.
- Feedback as a class. Ask students who they think the person is. [Brad Pitt]

### 2. Contextualized Activity (from 'review' to 'free use')

- Speaking to the class: "We are going to talk about things that are possible in the future." Remind students which modal verbs can be used to express possibility and probability in the future. [*may, might, could*]

Divide the class into pairs and hand out *Oxford Wordskills* worksheet:

**TASK INSTRUCTIONS:**

- A.** Ask each pair to look at the diary entry and glossary, then do exercises 1 and 2 together. Correct the exercises as a class.  
Point out that exercise 2 shows us how sure we are about something.
- B.** Using modal verbs and the expressions from *Oxford Word Skills*, students write sentences in pairs about their plans for the following week.
- C.** Ask several pairs to read out their sentences.

**HOMEWORK/EXPANSION****Extra Activity**

Ask your students to choose a famous person and to write similar statements to those in Activity 2. Students find a partner and read their sentences aloud. Their partner guesses who the person is using sentences with *may, might, could, must* and *can't*.

Ask students to try the OVER TO YOU practice section.

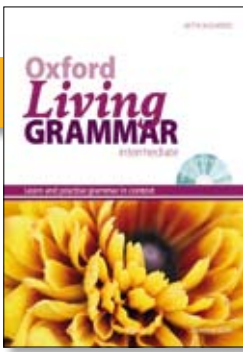
**EXTRA HELP**

**Did your students remember the topic:** form and main uses of modals verbs to express possibility and probability?

(if not, revisit the presentation sections of *Oxford Living Grammar Intermediate* Unit 7)

**Do your students need more practice?:** Try exercises A and B on pages 1 and 2 for more practice.

**Have you got the right books to develop and extend vocabulary?:** use units from *Oxford Word Skills* for 'I can...' confidence.



## Activity worksheet: Possibility and probability

### Activity 1

#### What to do, where to go

Holly and Adam have just got married and have gone on their honeymoon. A friend talks to Holly's mother about their plans for the future. Rewrite the parts in brackets using *must*, *can't* or *may/might*.

FRIEND Just married and on their honeymoon. *They must be*<sup>0</sup> (I'm sure they're) very happy. Where are they going to live after they come back?

MOTHER *They may stay*<sup>0</sup> (Perhaps they'll stay) with us for a while.

FRIEND What about work?

MOTHER They .....<sup>1</sup> (Maybe they'll go) abroad for a year.

FRIEND So Holly .....<sup>2</sup> (I assume that Holly's not) very interested in the job she's got. I thought she enjoyed her work.

MOTHER She does, but they both have one of those temporary contracts, and the company .....<sup>3</sup> (perhaps the company won't renew) them.

FRIEND Yes, that's always a possibility.

MOTHER Or they .....<sup>4</sup> (maybe they'll take) a postgraduate course.

FRIEND Would they get a grant?

MOTHER No, I don't think so but they've both worked for a couple of years so they .....<sup>5</sup> (I'm sure they have) some savings.

FRIEND But Adam's father has his own business, doesn't he? He .....<sup>6</sup> (Maybe he'll find) work for them.

MOTHER I'm not sure. Holly quite likes Adam's father but she .....<sup>7</sup> (perhaps she won't want) to work for him.

FRIEND You see. It's not easy to work for in-laws and it .....<sup>8</sup> (I'm sure it isn't) easy to live with them, either.

MOTHER All right. I see your point.



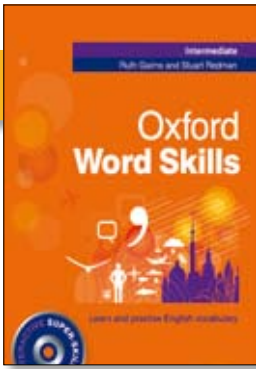
### Activity 2 Guess who it is!

- 1 He studied journalism and advertising at college.
- 2 He wears a wedding ring.
- 3 He speaks with an American accent.
- 4 He gives a lot of money to charity.
- 5 He travels to lots of film festivals for work.
- 6 He has six children.

### Over to you:

Imagine that you have arranged to meet a friend, but he is late. Suggest three things that might have happened to him/her, using *may*, *might* and *could*.

Think about what you might do after you have finished your studies at school, and write three of them, using *may*, *might* and *could*, and starting with 'After I've finished my studies at school, ...'



## 59 I can express probability 🎧

Next week in the life of **pessimistic** Pamela, aged 15



- Sunday:** I'm going to a barbecue next Saturday. I'll **definitely** see Max (the boy I **fancy**).
- Monday:** My best friend Sarah said she's going. She's **bound to** speak to him first, and she's prettier than me, so Max is more **likely to** fancy her.
- Tuesday:** I've got nothing to wear - I **doubt if** he'll even notice me.
- Wednesday:** If he does speak to me, I **expect** he'll think I'm stupid.
- Thursday:** I've heard there's another party on Saturday - Max **might** go there instead.
- Friday:** There's a **good chance** it'll rain tomorrow. The barbecue will be a **disaster**.
- Saturday:** Woke up with a **spot** on my face - I'm definitely not going.

### Glossary

- pessimistic** always believing bad things will happen. **OPP optimistic.**
- definitely** certainly; for sure.
- fancy sb** INF be attracted to sb.
- bound to do sth** If sb is **bound to do sth**, they will almost certainly do it.
- likely to do sth** If sb is **likely to do sth**, they will probably do it. **OPP unlikely to do sth.**
- doubt (if/that ...)** If you **doubt if** or **that** sth will happen, you think it probably won't happen.
- expect sth** think or believe sth will happen.
- might** used to say that sth is possible. **SYN may.**
- a chance** a possibility (**a good chance** is a more than 50 per cent possibility).
- disaster** INF If sth is a **disaster**, it is terrible.
- spot** an unpleasant red or yellow mark on the skin (teenagers have them).

### 1 Complete the definitions.

- ▶ If something is a disaster, it is terrible.
- If something is bound to happen, it will ..... certainly happen.
  - If something is likely to take place, it will ..... take place.
  - If something might happen, you can also say that it ..... happen.
  - If there's a chance that something will happen, it means it is ..... that it will happen.
  - If you expect something to happen, it means you ..... it will happen.
  - If you think that something is unlikely, it means it is ..... not going to happen.
  - If you doubt that something will happen, it means you ..... think it is going to happen.
  - If you are pessimistic, you always believe that ..... things will happen.

### 2 A friend is taking an exam next week. Will she pass? Look at the percentage (%) on the right and write sentences with a similar meaning. Don't use the verb **think**.

- ▶ She'll definitely pass. PASS?
- |   |       |          |
|---|-------|----------|
| 1 | ..... | 100% yes |
| 2 | ..... | 95% yes  |
| 3 | ..... | 75% yes  |
| 4 | ..... | 50% yes  |
| 5 | ..... | 25% yes  |
|   |       | 100% no  |

### 3 ABOUT YOU Use the vocabulary to write sentences about your life next week.